

**FRANKLIN COUNTY VSP
WORKGROUP MEETING MINUTES**

January 26, 2017

**Franklin Conservation District
1724 E. Superior Street, Pasco WA 99301**

ATTENDED BY

Kent McMullen (FC NRAC), Dave Solem (SCBID), Perry Beale (WSDA), Case VanderMeulen (Dairy), Comm. Rick Miller (Franklin County), Keith Johnson (Franklin County), Valerie Carlson (LCBAS), Debbie Berkowitz (LCBAS), Mark Weiseler (FCD), Mike Ritter (WDFW), Mark Nielson (FCD), Heather Wendt (FCD), Matt Harris (WA State Potato Commission), James Alford (FC Farm Bureau), Josh Jensen (Anchor QEA), Ben Floyd (Anchor QEA), John Small (Anchor QEA).

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Ben Floyd welcomed the group and introductions were made.

DECEMBER WORKGROUP MEETING RE-CAP

Ben reviewed the group's discussion on goals and measurable benchmarks that occurred during the last meeting.

Outreach strategy and status updates will be covered later in the meeting.

Last month the group discussed artificial wetlands. Ecology staff provided clarification that if irrigation practices are changed (such as moving irrigation away from a particular field for a year or two, or water conservation practices are implemented), and the wetland dries up and no longer performs wetland functions, then no mitigation is required. Therefore irrigation efficiency projects that impact wetlands will not be counted against the critical area baseline. This would result in an adjustment to the critical area baseline by removing the wetland.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF WORK PLAN

Section 1 of the work plan is meant to be a short summary. There will be a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. Do workgroup members have any questions that we should make sure are answered in this section? Some suggested questions at the meeting included:

- What funding is available and what is the impact?
- What if I do nothing?
- How do I get credit for enhancements that I implement on my land?

Mike Ritter suggested moving the FAQ section up in the document after the VSP background information. Anchor QEA has developed a VSP 101 document and also has a general article

summarizing the VSP process that can be used as an educational tool and published in the FC Graphic and Audubon newsletter, for example.

The intro will include the “why” we are doing this and what happens if this process fails. Are there requirements on maintenance of practices? This is a 10 year program, with a performance review every 5 years. The plan will provide contact information for the conservation district for producers who are interested in obtaining more information or who want to participate in the program. Is this program for landowners only or can lessees participate? Yes. For cost-shared practices, if the lessee has control of the ground for the practice life or if the landowner acknowledges that they will continue the practice for the required timeframe then those practices would be counted.

Section 2 of the work plan will focus on the regional setting and will include maps and other information to provide context to help educate readers and set up the baseline and existing conditions section (Section 3).

Section 3 of the work plan focuses on baseline and existing conditions. Critical area intersections with ag lands include less intersects for wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas and frequently flooded areas within the County. More intersects can be found with wind and water erosion potential and critical aquifer recharge areas within the County. The Geo Hazard example contains the Ringold Slope and slopes that have the potential for severe water erosion per the County’s Critical Area Ordinance. Do we want to include wind erosion potential as a critical area since it is not in the County code or do we want to only discuss it in the context of agricultural viability? The consensus was to discuss wind erosion only in the Ag Viability section of the plan.

Section 4 covers protection and enhancement of critical areas. Slide 22 contains information on the top 10 NRCS practices implemented in Franklin County between 2011 and 2016. Mike Ritter pointed out that the slide is misleading in that it doesn’t account for practices implemented in or adjacent to critical areas. A disclaimer should be added that the practices may or may not be implemented in critical areas but they may provide a potential benefit to the function and value of critical areas. The group also discussed emphasizing in the plan that critical areas enhancement is voluntary.

Bonneville Power Administration provides incentives to producers to implement irrigation efficiencies through Franklin PUD and Big Bend. We may be able to use their data for measures implemented. CRP does have an impact on wildlife habitat and protection on adjacent critical areas. CRP is being reduced on a nationwide basis. We need a statewide discussion on how CRP will be treated in the VSP process.

Sections 1 through 4 were geared toward educating producers who would participate in the program. Section 5 shows the logic for developing goals and benchmarks. Anchor QEA discussed their idea of connecting conservation practices to specific benchmark goals based on the Conservation Practice Physical Effect (CPPE). CPPE scores would be used to track historic conservation practice enrollment and the effectiveness of practices on functions and values of critical areas. The group expressed concerns about measurable benchmarks having to be

quantifiable versus being broader. According to John Small, the Tech Panel has asked us to provide this level of detail. Brian Cochrane, VSP Tech Panel Member, has asked for a clear tie between conservation practices and the benefits to critical areas. The group also expressed concerns about the proposed CPPE methodology proposed that would connect conservation practices to critical areas functions, and how this would connect practices to existing critical areas. A follow up workshop is desired to discuss this methodology in greater detail.

Recidivism was discussed, which is essentially how to account for changes in practices when they end. Lower recidivism is expected for practices that have: high barriers to entry/exit; increased land productivity and lowers cost. Higher recidivism can be expected for practices that have: low barriers to entry/exit (easily removed); reduced land in production; rotational use or that have a reliance on unstable conservation funding or incentives (e.g., CRP).

The workgroup expressed a desire to have protection and enhancement tracking information specific to each critical area type.

DISCUSS OUTREACH STRATEGY

To date we have had a display at the Pasco Ag. Show. Romona Rommeriem, NRAC, said that it received a great deal of interest from producers. Heather and Ben will be presenting at a grower meeting on March 1st. Members were asked to contact Heather to schedule presentation to other interested groups.

NEXT STEPS

February – CPPE Workshop – Date and Time TBD

March 23, 2017 – Next Meeting Date – at the FCD Office – 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Public Comment / Other:

ADJOURN

The meeting concluded at 3:00 pm